<u>IN THE CLAIMS</u>:

Please cancel Claims 17 and 18 without prejudice or disclaimer of subject matter and amend the claims as shown below. The claims, as pending in the subject application, read as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) An image processing method <u>executed by an image processing apparatus having a scan function which scans an original</u> ~~implemented by a computer for selectively storing an input image in a database~~, <u>the method</u> comprising the steps of:

<u>(a) scanning the original to generate an input image;</u>

[[(a)]] <u>(b)</u> acquiring first search information associated with the input image on the basis of <u>search</u> information input by a user;

[[(b)]] <u>(c)</u> acquiring feature data contained in the input image as second search information, and attempting to detect pointer information from the input image indicating a storage location of an original data file in the database;

[[(c)]] <u>(d)</u> searching for the original data file corresponding to the input image in the database using the pointer information in a case that the pointer information is detected in step [[(b)]] <u>(c)</u>, and searching for the original data file using the first and second search information in a case that the pointer information is not detected in step [[(b)]] <u>(c)</u>;

[[(d)]] <u>(e)</u> converting the input image into outline data and storing the outline data in the database, in a case where the original data file corresponding to the input image is not found in step [[(c)]] <u>(d)</u>, wherein the outline data indicates a visual representation of a ~~tracng~~ <u>tracing</u> of the outline of a character or a graphic object;

[[(e)]] (f) declining to store the input image data into the database, in a case that the original data file corresponding to the input image is found in step [[(c)]] (d); and

[[(f)]] (g) registering the search information input by the user in step [[(a)]] (b) and the feature data acquired in step (b) in an index file regardless of whether the original data file corresponding to the input image is or is not found in step (d), wherein the index file of registered search information input by the user is used in a next search for the original data file in step (c).

2. (Canceled)

3. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein the first search information comprises a keyword for searching using the input image.

4. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein the first search information comprises a data size of the original data file.

5. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein the first search information comprises date information of the original data file.

6. (Canceled)

7. (Original) The method according to claim 1, wherein the second search information comprises a character code of a character recognition result which is obtained

by performing a character recognition process with respect to a character region in the input image.

8. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein the second search information comprises feature data of each block obtained by region segmentation of the input image.

9. (Canceled).

10. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of:

[[(g)]] converting the input image, which has been converted into the outline data, into data in a format which can be handled by application software.

11. and 12. (Canceled).

13. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of:

[[(g)]] outputting the original data file, wherein new pointer information is added to the original data file.

14. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 13, wherein the new pointer information is added as a digital watermark to the original data file.

15. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1, wherein in the step [[(c)]] (d), the original data file is searched for by using at least one of keyword search, full-text search, and layout search.

16. (Currently Amended) An image processing apparatus having a scan function which scans an original system which selectively stores an image file corresponding to an input image, comprising:

a scanning unit constructed to scan the original to generate an input image;

an input unit constructed to acquire input first search information associated with the input image, wherein the first search information is acquired on the basis of search information input by a user;

a acquisition unit constructed to acquire feature data contained in the input image as second search information, and constructed to attempt to detect pointer information from the input image indicating a storage location of an original data file in a database;

a search unit constructed to search for the original data file corresponding to the input image in the database using the pointer information in a case that the pointer information is detected, and constructed to search for the original data file using the first and second search information in a case that the pointer information is not detected;

a conversion unit constructed to convert the input image into outline data and to store the outline data in the database, in a case where no original data file corresponding to the input image is found by said search unit, wherein the outline data

indicates a visual representation of a tracing of the outline of a character or a graphic object,

a decision unit constructed to decline storing the input image data into the database, in a case that the original data file corresponding to the input image is found by said search unit; and

a registration unit for registering the <u>search</u> information input by the <u>user</u> ~~input unit and the feature data acquired by the acquisition unit~~ in an index file <u>regardless of whether the original data file corresponding to the input image is or is not found by said search unit</u>, wherein the index file <u>of registered search information input by the user</u> is used in a next search for the original data file ~~by the search unit~~.

17. to 18. (Cancelled)

19. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 13, wherein the new pointer information is added as a two-dimensional barcode to the original data file.